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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese- and English-language dailies all gave significant straight news reporting and editorial coverage November 6 to the election of Democrat Barack Obama as the next U.S. president. News coverage also focused on the mass protests in Taipei Wednesday against the visit of Chairman Chen Yunlin of China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an analysis in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" criticized Ma Ying-jeou for eagerly tilting toward Beijing while the United States was engaged in its presidential election. The article said the status quo across the Taiwan Strait, which is highly valued by the United States, is "undergoing quantitative and qualitative changes." Editorials in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily," pro-unification "United Daily News" and the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" all hailed the Obama victory and U.S. progress in ethnic equality. A separate "United Daily News" op-ed urged the Ma Ying-jeou administration to start close communication with Obama's foreign policy advisors before he assumes office, so as to lay a foundation of mutual trust between Taiwan and the new U.S. administration. A "China Times" op-ed said Obama's Asia policy advisers are clearly aware of the complexity of the cross-Strait situation, so the chances are slim for him to tip in favor of China. A separate "China Times" op-ed hailed Obama's election and spelled out several thorny issues that he will have to face. An editorial in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" praised Obama's victory as a manifestation of democracy and the need for change. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" also applauded Obama's victory and said the Democrats are now more likely to take a firm stance against China and Taiwan's KMT administration on human rights and democracy issues than its rival Republicans. End summary.

A) "United States Fully Engaged in its Presidential Election, While the Ma Administration Is Busy Tilting toward China"

Journalist Su Yung-yao noted in an analysis in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 700,000] (11/6):

"Barack Obama was elected U.S. president Wednesday. While it still takes time for [Obama's] national security team to take shape and start operations, major changes have taken place in the Taiwan Strait. The 'maintaining of the status quo across the Taiwan Strait,' which the United States has highly valued, is currently undergoing quantitative and qualitative changes. The cross-Strait situation is quickly tipping in favor of China, particularly as the Ma administration is eager to negotiate with Beijing while Washington is fully engaged in its presidential election. ...

"Previously Taiwan was able to have the upper hand strategically [in terms of its interactions with Beijing], but with the Ma administration taking over the helm beginning May 20, the island has unduly and suddenly been seeking so-called reconciliation and goodwill gesture from Beijing, while the international environment is not necessarily favorable for Taiwan. All the other forces that are friendly with Taiwan, such as the United States, can only stand

aside and watch [such a development]. ... The Ma Administration may argue that the U.S. State Department has said that it welcomes the resumption of dialogue between Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation and China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait. But what else can other countries such as the United States say when even Taiwan itself is unwilling to attach importance to [and take advantage of] the power that is in favor of the island? What is more worrisome for the United States is that at this moment, when there is a short period of power vacuum in the Taiwan Strait, Taipei's tilt toward China has enabled Beijing quickly to fill the void. ..."

B) "The Seventh Evolution of the United States"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] editorialized (11/6):

"... Barack Obama is about to face very severe challenges, but his election has sent a clear signal to the world: The Americans have climbed over the high mountains of ethnic antagonism and succeeded with a soft landing, both psychologically and ideologically. Such self-innovative rationality, courage, capability and mechanics will be sufficient to make the United States a great country, if not the only superpower, in the 21st century."

C) "Obama: New American Dream, New American Values"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (11/6):

"... It is noteworthy that Barack Obama's unique background -- having a Caucasian mother, an African father and an Indonesian stepfather, being raised in Hawaii and having a Muslim middle name

-- has resulted in his habit of thinking 'marginally.' This has not only enabled him to keep balance, but his view of the world also tends to tilt toward universal values that are more tolerant and diversified, in contrast to Washington D.C.-centered pride and prejudice. Judging from this perspective, it is expected that he will be able to reconstruct U.S. values, lead the United States with 'pluralism' to regain recognition from the world, and renounce [President] Bush's 'unilateralist' hegemonic leadership. At least, tension between the United States and the Islamic world will be alleviated immediately. One must not forget that the results of various surveys have showed that over eighty percent of the people in other countries, including Taiwan, if they had the right to vote, would pick Obama. Such wide, trans-national support will be a valuable asset for Obama to reconstruct U.S. confidence and values. ..."

D) "Stabilizing the New Triangular Relationship"

Alexander Huang, an assistant professor at the Graduate Institute of International Affairs and Strategic Studies at Tamkang University, opined in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 420,000] (11/6):

"... The election of Obama to as president comes at a critical juncture, when the United States is facing significant economic and diplomatic predicaments and the rise and decline of strong powers. Facing China's rapid rise economically and militarily, the United States is unlikely to ignore Beijing's clout in international affairs. When dealing with the triangular relationship of the United States, China and Taiwan, our country should avoid making trouble, [which would] thereby force Obama to seek Beijing's assistance to stabilize the situation across the Taiwan Strait. On the contrary, [Taiwan] should make efforts in improving cross-Strait relations, which is the pillar to uphold the framework where the three bilateral relationships of the U.S.-Taiwan, U.S.-China, and cross-Strait will simultaneously operate well. Only by such an approach can our country [Taiwan] maintain the right to speak in the triangular relationship."

E) "Revelations of Obama's [Victory]: Yes, Change We Want"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 220,000] editorialized 911/6):

"... The immediate significance manifested by Barack Obama's election is, without a doubt, that U.S. society has made a big step ahead toward ethnic equality. ... Even until the eve of the voting, many people still could not believe that all the polling results showed that Obama was in the lead. The fact that the United States has elected an African-American president indicates that the tolerance of ethnic equality in U.S. society has truly made a significant progress. ...

"In short, the election of Obama signifies the commencement of a new era of ethnic equality; it also signifies that the international situation will begin to change, and that there will be a brand new turning point for the global financial and economic order. Obama's election is not merely a victory for himself or the Democratic Party; it also marks the beginning of 'change' that world citizens are looking forward to."

F) "An Election That Has Rewritten the U.S. History"

Dr. Lin Cheng-yi, a research fellow at the Institute of European and American Studies, Academia Sinica., opined in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 220,000] (11/6):

"... Obama sees China as a competitor, not an enemy, and he regards Japan as an ally. He is concerned with China's manipulation of the exchange rate of the Renminbi. The United States must express its disagreement to China in terms of the latter's intellectual property rights, human rights record, environmental protection, and its policy toward Sudan and Iran. China needs to play the role of a responsible big country, and the United States also needs to be vigilant and closely monitor China's enhancement of its strategic capabilities. Obama hopes that the United States and China can join hands in addressing the challenges of nuclear proliferation and global warming. Obama supports arms sales to Taiwan and confidence-building measures across the Taiwan Strait.

"Even though Obama does not appear to support Taiwan as obviously as John McCain, his Asia policy advisers such as Jeffrey Bader and Richard Bush of the Brookings Institution are clearly aware of the complexity of the cross-Strait situation. As a result, the chances are slim for him to tip in favor of China. ..."

G) "Obama's American Dreams and Challenges"

Freelancer Wu Fang-ming wrote in the "International Column" in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 220,000] (11/6):

"... However, behind [what Barack Obama once said] that 'everything is possible in my American dream,' the new leader of the United States is going to face a series of thorny issues domestically and internationally, which will be the most critical situation to deal with since [the time of] Abraham Lincoln. First, with respect to international relations or the world order, after the Iraq war, the gap between the United States' actual strength and the requirement of the United States to be a global leader is getting bigger. The circumstances even resulted in the United States isolating itself [from the international community] by [pursuing] unilateralism. The countries of the world did not want to follow the lead [of the United States]. What was left were only boos and the notoriety of [the United States] being a unilateral hegemonic leader.

"Second, with respect to the economy, Obama will face three major economic difficulties which are: saving the sluggish economy; stabilizing the financial system and rebuild the heavily impacted financial system; and trade policy with China. ... China has become a leading United States creditor and economic partner. The mutual reliance [between China and the United States] economically is growing. However, the United States will have to handle carefully the concerns over whether the United States will become protectionist [country] that China and developing countries have been worried about in terms of disagreements on issues such as textile quotas, the appreciation of the Chinese Yuan, and trade deficits. ..."

H) "Barack Obama's Victory Signifies Need for Change"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post"

[circulation: 30,000] editorialized (11/6):

"Barack Obama's overwhelming win in the U.S. presidential race proves that the United States is really a democratic and peaceful nation. It is an historic achievement that symbolizes the end of racial prejudice. ... Obama has won the race mainly by emphasizing the need for change - a message that has resonated with the voting public. Most Americans have suffered greatly from a prolonged financial crisis, a situation they blame on George W. Bush, the current Republican President. ...

"He and his Democratic majority on Capitol Hill now face the task of governing the United States through a difficult period. Ironically, the circumstances that contributed to his victory will test his ability to lead the country. ... People in Taiwan are unavoidably concerned whether the United States, with Obama as its head of state, will continue to provide the island with the military aid it needs in defending against a possible attack from mainland China. In our view, the U.S. government won't significantly change its policy toward either Taiwan or mainland China, because a peaceful Taiwan Strait will be in the best interests of America."

I) "Obama's Triumph Good News for Taiwan"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (11/6):

"... Obama's status as the first black American to be president of the United States is full of historical significance and is being welcomed worldwide as a symbol of triumph over slavery and racial prejudice as well as a triumph for ordinary citizens and progressive values over elitism and ultraconservative or even reactionary social, culture and political forces in the world's only superpower. ... However, it is important to note that the most important factor in his victory and of the Democratic Party in both houses of Congress was the resolve and passion of young, minority and progressive voters opposed to the illegal and disastrous war against Iraq conducted by incumbent Republican president George W. Bush and against Iraq and the associated deterioration of the U.S. economy, social welfare and human rights standards within the U.S. and Bush's fatal unilateralism and disdain for global human rights, environmental, labor and moral standards in his foreign policy. ...

"Since Obama will be initially be occupied with global economic and domestic social issues, the change in power next Jan. 20 is unlikely to immediately impact on Washington's policies toward Taiwan. Nevertheless, we believe that the return of Democratic Party governance should at least benefit Taiwan indirectly, especially if he is able to pull the U.S. out of the Iraqi morass and restore a multilateral diplomacy. ... In addition, the future Obama administration is likely to adopt a firm stance on many issues in Sino-American relations, including China's export of "black heart" defective and dangerous foods, beverages and other goods to the United States, just like to Taiwan and other countries and perhaps even press Beijing to enhance labor standards, improve environmental protection, improve food and product safety standards and other measures that will help 'even the playing field' and promote fairer trade.

"Taiwan's democracy should also benefit from the fact that the Democratic Party is historically also more concerned with issues of international human rights and democracy than its conservative rival, and the Obama administration and the Democratic congressional leadership will include numerous officials or congresspersons who have a high commitment to promoting human rights. Therefore, Obama's triumph will likely generate 'inconvenience' for Taiwan's newly restored rightist ruling Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), which has long had a 'community of values' with the far-right wing of the Republican Party, especially in the decades of authoritarian rule under KMT autocrat Chiang Kai-shek and his son Ching-kuo. ... Even if many of his foreign policy advisers look favorably on the resumption of cross-strait dialogue between the KMT government and the PRC as conducive for regional peace, it is open to question whether Obama will accept a rollback of Taiwan's democracy and human rights or the revival of KMT authoritarianism or even the transfer of 'Democratic Taiwan' into the PRC as the price tag. A shared set of values, including democracy, human rights, freedom and

sustainability, between the Democratic Party and Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party and Taiwanese civic and social reform organizations, can provide a foundation for dialogue that may be essential to keep the lighthouse of East Asian democracy shining in Taiwan."

YOUNG